

GREENS COUNCILLOR IRENE DOUTNEY

CITY OF SYDNEY COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 29th July 2013



Red tape threatens Erskineville community garden

City of Sydney Council will debate whether or not to approve a popular community garden in Erskineville Rd tonight (Monday 29th July), with the recommended position presented to Councillors being that the garden should not go ahead. Greens Councillor Irene Doutney says that this would be a sad outcome for Erskineville that would represent a victory of bureaucracy over the community interest.

“A group of keen local gardeners started growing food plants on the vacant Council owned site around 4 years ago.” Clr Doutney said. “They didn’t have formal approval to do it but they were producing fresh food with land that would otherwise have gone to waste, so I was fully supportive of them.

“Unfortunately, despite having a policy of encouraging sustainable urban food production Council seems to have set up roadblocks for the gardeners ever since. Numerous reasons have been given as to why the garden shouldn’t be approved but most of them don’t stand up to strong scrutiny. I think ultimately this garden is being shut down because it doesn’t meet a vision of a nice orderly manicured gardens and street scape and because Council wants to sell the land, although it’s sat idle for the last 40 years.”

Clr Doutney said that when the City consulted surrounding residents on the garden, responses were quite positive, with 30 responses received in favour of the garden compared to 12 opposing it. The gardeners have also lodged a petition from 132 local people supporting the garden.

“Being able to grow food is an important skill that is being rapidly lost in our urbanised society. Gardens like this can serve as a great way for people to rediscover that skill while getting access to free fresh food and meeting their neighbours. Council should be celebrating the fact that projects like this can start up spontaneously, without requiring the large grants that have been used to get other community gardens going, but instead they’re trying to shut it down.

“It is very disappointing for residents, who want to start a little project, to find themselves stymied by red tape and disapproval and ultimately it discourages community members

from trying anything based on their own initiative and local interest. The garden isn't perfect but with support from Council it could be greatly improved and its problems overcome.

"Sydney calls itself a 'City of Villages', and having projects like this spontaneously pop up is the heart of the village ethos. Having them shut down by some central authority for bureaucratic reasons is the antithesis of the village ideal. I hope my fellow Councillors will see that tonight and support this important project." Clr Doutney concluded.

For more information contact Irene Doutney on 0416 410 374